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## THE HOME ASSIGNMENT ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Modern Kazakhstan society is characterized by social modernization and inclusion in the global integration processes, where education takes the leading position. The introduction into the educational process of secondary schools in three languages is a significant step forward in the direction of the implementation of the State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the basic competencies of which are trilingualism, Eurasian multiculturalism, communication and technocracy [1].

As part of the trilingual program, special attention is paid to the study of foreign languages, including English as the language of intercultural communication. Issues of effective teaching of English become relevant. The homework issues being the subject of the article are one of the poorly studied topic and, in a sense, underestimated in the national teaching methodology [2].

To solve this problem the “Guidelines for the organization and implementation of homework in secondary schools in Kazakhstan” have been developed as part of the updated content program [3].

This document, defining the scope and time for doing homework, is intended for managers of secondary schools, teachers and parents.

The recommendations were developed in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated July 27, 2007 "On Education", the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated August 8, 2002 "On the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Kazakhstan", “Rules for Educational Organizations according to Educational Levels”, approved by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of May 17, 2013, No. 499 [3].

The main purpose of the Recommendations is to preserve the health of schoolchildren, to avoid overloading students due to an increase in the volume and intensity of home study loads, and also to provide methodological assistance to teachers on how to organize homework [3].

Homework is the independent fulfillment of the teacher’s assignments to consolidate and more deeply assimilate the material being studied, as well as its application in practice, the development of creative abilities and the improvement of



educational skills. If a student has achieved the goal of learning in a lesson (“knows,” “understands,” “applies,” “analyzes,” “evaluate,” and “synthesizes”), then the need for homework is excluded.

Teachers do not set homework for weekends, holidays (except for reading fiction, reference books for general development, problem solving for in-depth study of mathematics and project work). Dual lessons are acceptable for middle and high school students in order to reduce the time spent on homework.

The document presents recommendations to the following participants in the educational process on the organization of homework: the subject teacher, parents (legal representatives), class teacher, school leaders. Recommendations should be brought to the attention of teachers, students and their parents [3].

According to the rules "Sanitary and epidemiological requirements for educational institutions", approved by order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan of December 29, 2014 No. 179, homework is given to students taking into account the possibility of their implementation and entering data into a grade book. The recommended time (in astronomical hours) for homework is: in 2-3 classes - not more than 1.5 hours, in 4-5 classes - not more than 2 hours, in 6-8 classes - not more than 2.5 hours, in 9-11 classes - no more than 3 hours ” [3].

The data of the international study PISA (2012) show that Kazakhstani schoolchildren spend too much time preparing homework (8.8 hours per week; 4th place out of 65 countries). At the same time, it was proved that children's performance is best influenced by a small amount of homework. In addition, when preparing for lessons, children resort to the help of their parents in Kazakhstan more often than their peers from other countries of the world (1st place from 65 countries) [4].

#### *Analysis of the questionnaire of middle school students (1<sup>st</sup> section)*

To identify the degree of awareness of homework issues, we conducted a survey of students, teachers and parents of secondary schools in Pavlodar and Ekibastuz on the main problems of homework.

This article presents the results of a student survey. 303 pupils of 5 and 7 classes of secondary schools of Pavlodar and Ekibastuz took part in the study. A student questionnaire consists of two sections, each of which contains 16 questions.

In Section 1, the task was to find out what of the adults students live with. It turned out that 56% of students live in full families (with mom and dad); 26% - with the mother, 9% - with the mother and stepfather, 9% - with the grandmother and grandfather. Thus, more than half of the students in these classes live in full families, but a quarter of the students live only with their mother.

The following results were obtained to the question “What is your average English grade?”. 11% of students have an excellent mark (5), 66% - good (4), 23% of students have a satisfactory mark (3). Thus, the majority of students in these classes have excellent and good marks in English.

The next question was about the educational level of the parents. It turned out that the education of the mothers is as follows: 13% graduated from secondary



school, 26% from a vocational technical school, and 61% from a higher educational institution. Thus, more than half of the mothers of students have a higher education. As for the educational level of the fathers, 4% graduated from high school, 48% from a vocational technical school and 48% from a higher educational institution. Thus, almost equally number of fathers (a half) has a higher and a vocational education.

The next question was about the quality of education in school. 65% of students believe that the quality of education in their school is good, 22% - effective and 13% - satisfactory. More than half of students in these classes positively assess the quality of the education they receive in school.

As for the amount of time students spend at their school”, 87% of students were at school of more than 5 hours and only 13% of students - 5 hours. Thus, the overwhelming majority answered that they attend school for more than 5 hours, which meets the requirements of a five-day school week in grades 5–7 of a secondary school.

Next, we needed to find out what advantages and disadvantages associated with attending school students have. The question is: “How much do the proposed statements describe you?” 57% of students chose to say that they have many friends, 52% have good relations with parents, 35% feel happy at school this year, 35% feel safe, 13% feel bored at school, 9% of students often find themselves in difficult situations, and 9% often feel sad. Thus, the majority of students in these classes have many friends, which indicates a friendly class atmosphere. More than half of the respondents have good relationships with their parents, and one third of the students feel safe and happy at school. Attention should be paid to the statements about boredom and sadness students feel during school hours as well as the situations students consider challenged for them.

The following item questioned the duration of sleep during the weekdays. 9% of pupils spend less than 5 hours on sleep on weekdays, 4% - 5 hours, 9% - 6 hours, 39% - 7 hours, 30% - 8 hours, 9% of pupils spend 9 hours on sleep. Thus, one third of students spend 7 hours on sleep, and 30% of students spend 8 hours on sleep during a week. This suggests that most of the students in these classes have enough time to sleep, since the recommended duration of a schoolchild's sleep for 10–12 years is between 8–10 hours.

The next question concerns the degree of wakefulness and fatigue, as well as the level of concentration in the lesson. 57% of students chose the statement “I hardly get up in the morning,” 35% - “I get very tired in class,” 4% - “I fly in the clouds during lessons,” 4% - “I find it difficult to concentrate on the lessons, because I want to eat”. Thus, more than half of students claims that it is difficult for them to get up in the morning, and also a third of the schoolchildren get very tired in class and couldn't concentrate on the lesson. It is advisable to pay attention to the situation as it'll have some consequences to the student's health and quality of studying.

In order to find out who the student is addressing as problems arise at school, we have formulated the following question: “If you have problems at school, which adults do you turn to?”. 65% of pupils turn to teachers as soon as problems arise at school, 31% of pupils turn to parents, and only 4% contact a school inspector. Thus,



more than half of the students, having difficulties, turn to the teachers, and one third of the students also turn to the parents. This shows a high level of trust between students and teachers of the observed classes and the role of parents in solving the students' problems.

Next question is "Do you like to go to school?". 78% of students like to go to school; however 22% of respondents do not like to go to school. Thus, the overwhelming number of students attends school with a desire. The recommendations to the school officers, nevertheless, are to find out the reasons of the students' dislike attending school.

We also managed to figure out the amount of time students spend with friends when they are out of school on weekdays. 17% of students do not spend their time with friends outside of school, 9% of schoolchildren spend 30 minutes meeting friends, 22% of students spend 45 minutes with friends, 13% of students spend one hour with friends, 13% of students spend 1.5 hours with friends, 13% - 2 hours, 4% - 2.5 hours, 9% - 3 hours. Thus, a quarter of the class spends 45 minutes with their friends outside school on weekdays, but one third of the students spend time with friends outside the school from 1 hour to 2 hours. As we can observe the friends' relationship in this age group is quite important and school administration and parents should pay attention to the amount and quality of this type of friendship.

Regarding the time spent participating in activities on weekdays (such as sports, music, etc.), 13% of students do not attend extracurricular activities, 13% of students spend 30 minutes on hobby / sports, etc., 4 % students participate in extracurricular activities 45 minutes a day, 22% - 1 hour, 26% - 1.5 hours, 9% - 2 hours, 9% - 2.5 hours, 4% of students participate in extracurricular activities for more than 3 hours. Thus, a quarter of a class spends 1 hour on participation in cultural or sporting activities, also a quarter of students spend 1.5 hours and more doing extra activities outside school on weekdays. It is a good tool of changing activities and forming additional habits except learning ones which, in its turn, should affect good performance at school.

As for the time spent on housework (cleaning, caring for relatives, caring for animals, etc.), 4% of students spend on housework for 15 minutes, 4% of students spend 30 minutes for housework or caring for relatives, 13% of students - 45 minutes, 43% spend 1 hour, 27% - 1.5 hours, 9% spend on housework or caring for relatives 2 hours. Thus, more than half of the respondents spend from 1 to 2 hours on housework. This type of work helps in bringing up a responsible citizen and a caring person as well.

#### *Analysis of the questionnaire of middle school students (2<sup>nd</sup> section)*

The survey questions in section 2 concerned the frequency of homework assignments per week, the types of homework, the time it was completed, the amount of time spent, etc.

57% of students set their homework in English 1 or 2 times a week, 43% of students state that they are given homework 2 or 4 times a week. Thus, more than half of the students do the homework in English 1 or 2 times a week and about half of the



students state that they get homework in English 3 or 4 times a week.

Regarding the types of homework assignments, the following responses were received. 61% of students claim that this year they received a grammar assignment, 26% - a listening assignment, 35% - reading of a book or its parts, 39% - a preparation for exams or tests, 17% - a review of a book / story, 13% - writing an essay, 13% - writing a project, 22% - research or preparation of information for presentation in the class, 17% - creative tasks (creating a poster, newspaper, website, etc.). Thus, it should be noted that in the lesson of the English language various kinds of tasks were used, of which the majority of the students noted the grammar exercise. One third of the students claim that the creative tasks in English were also used.

Answering the question “When do you usually do your homework in English?”, 26% of students do their homework before school, 4% of students do their homework during the lessons, and 70% of students do their homework after class. Thus, the overwhelming majority of the class does homework in the English language after school, which suggests that schoolchildren spend a definite amount of time doing homework after school.

Answering the question “Where do you usually do your homework in English?”, 91% of students’ answers were at home and only 9% of students do it at school. Thus, the overwhelming majority of students in these classes do their homework in English at home which is a good sign of students’ progress at school.

The following answers were received to the question “How often do you discuss your homework in English with your parents?” 39% of students discuss homework rarely or never talk about it, 30% of students discuss homework with their parents, 17% of students discuss homework with parents 2 or 3 times a week, and 13% of students talk about homework with their parents every day. Thus, one third of students rarely discuss their homework in English with their parents, a small number of students talk about homework once a week, and only a minority of students support a conversation about homework in English every day. It is interesting to know the reasons why parents never discuss the homework with their children. Is it connected with the parents’ indifference to their children studying or something else? It may become the issue to discuss at school meeting with parents as well.

It was also interesting to know the amount of time spent on homework on weekdays. 4% of students spend 15 minutes on homework in English, 22% of students spend 30 minutes on homework, 35% of students use 45 minutes a day on homework, 22% spend 1 hour, 17% spend - 1.5 hours. Thus, more than a third of the students think that 30 to 45 minutes is enough for them to do their homework, one third of the class spends from 1 hour to 1.5 hours on their English homework. This is consistent with the requirements set forth in the "Methodological recommendations on the organization and implementation of homework in organizations of secondary education of the Republic of Kazakhstan": in 4-5 grades homework should last no more than 2 hours, in 6-8 grades - no more 2.5 hours [3].

The following answers were received to the question: “How often do you do your homework in English with friends?” 26% of students never do homework with friends, 49% of students very rarely do homework with friends. However, 9% of



students sometimes do homework with friends, and only 16% of students almost always do their homework in English with the help of their friends. Thus, about half of the class very rarely does homework in the English language with their friends; a quarter of the class does not help each other with their homework. However, a small number of schoolchildren sometimes or almost always do their homework in English with their friends.

Next question clarifies the activities that a student does while doing his or her homework in English. 35% of students listen to music, 9% of students watch TV, 17% talk on the phone, 13% of students write a message to a friend / girlfriend, 9% of students play video games while doing homework and 57% of students are fully concentrated doing their homework. Thus, a half of the class is fully focused on homework, while one third of students distracted from doing homework. The influence of this type of distraction to the quality of education may become the subject of the next study.

Answering the question about students' interest in doing homework and the amount of homework the students take, 43% agree that it is interesting to do the homework, 48% partly agree with this, and 9% believe that doing homework in English is not a pleasure. 13% agree, 9% partially agree, 78% disagree with the statement "Homework only takes my time and has nothing to do with what we learn in school". Thus, about half of the students agree that they enjoy doing their homework in English and understand the importance of having it.

The following answers were received to the question "How often do teachers comment on your grade for homework in English?". 13% of students believe that teachers very rarely comment on their marks for homework, 35% observe teacher's feedback on the assessment of homework rarely, 47% of students sometimes notice how their marks are commented by the teacher, 4% of schoolchildren say that most of the time the teacher comment on student grades. Thus, about half of the class believes that teachers sometimes give a comment for assessing the homework in the English language, but one third of the class claim that the teacher rarely comments on the assessment for homework in the English language. It is advisable to convey this information to teachers because the role of feedback in the learning process is very important.

Next question helps to find out from whom students receive help while having problems with homework. 48% of students ask for help from parents, 17% of students turn to brothers / sisters, friends / classmates / teachers, and 17% of students do not need help doing their homework, 43% students use the Internet to do their homework. The answers show that parents and Internet are the most popular resources the students use while doing the homework. Only small part of students does their homework by themselves which is a sign of insufficient work on forming the learners' autonomy at the lessons of the English language.

74% of students agree, 22% partially agree, 4% disagree with the statement of the importance of doing homework in a quiet place. 65% agree, 13% partially agree and 22% disagree with the statement about whether there is enough time for students to complete their homework. 57% agree with the statement "Homework helps me do



better in school”, 30% partially agree, 17% of pupils disagree. Thus, the overwhelming majority of students understand the importance of doing their homework in a quiet place, more than half of the students have sufficient time to do their homework in English, but a quarter of students do not agree that they have enough time to do homework. It should be noted that more than half of the class agree with the statement that doing homework helps students learn better in school.

The next question was related to stress tested during homework. 57% of students never experience stress while doing their homework on the English language, 26% of students rarely experience nervous tension during homework, 13% of students sometimes experience stress while doing homework, 4% of schoolchildren often experience stress. Thus, half of the students in these classes almost never experience stress in the process of doing their homework, but a quarter of the class is still under stress doing English homework.

### *Conclusions*

Analysis of the questionnaire data showed that the majority of students in these classes study well, which, in our opinion, is indirectly influenced by the education of their parents (more than half of them have a higher education). In addition, students' feedback speaks about effective and high-quality education in their schools, which is also a factor of the successful implementation of homework.

The study showed that the overwhelming majority of students consider the quality of education that they receive in these schools to be excellent. An indirect confirmation of this is almost 100% of students attending classes in these schools. When problems arise at school, most students most often turn to teachers; this suggests that there is trust and cooperation between teachers and students. This is the best variant of the relationship between students and teachers in the pedagogical process.

The results of the study also showed that the majority of students in grades 5 and 7 (48%) spend time on extra-curricular activities (sport, music, etc. - 1.5-2 hours), housework (1 hour), and hanging out with friends (30 minutes). Consequently, they do not have enough time to do their homework in all subjects, in particular, on English.

According to the data of the research, students in grades 5 and 7 spend an average of 1 hour - 1.5 hours on the homework on weekdays, in particular on English. As a result, students do not have enough time to sleep (22%). Thus a high level of fatigue in the classroom (74%) leads to a low student's concentration on the lesson, he / she poorly acquires knowledge, which makes it difficult to do homework.

The study also showed that a significant part of students in grades 5 and 7 (43%) is interested in doing their homework. This is more common among pupils studying by excellent marks (23%) and good marks (66%), which indicate good performance among students. In our opinion, it is a variety of homework types that contributes a high level of interest in doing homework. However, creative tasks (to invent, think, formulate, find, observe, analyze), requiring a deliberate, proactive approach, unfortunately, are not so common in schools. Most often there are types of



traditional tasks (read, rewrite, learn), the purpose of which is to repeat, consolidate the knowledge gained (LOTS).

The findings of the survey show that students who overcome the difficulties of doing homework with the help of classmates, the Internet, do well at school. More than half of the students, if they have problems with homework, turn to their parents. It means, on the one hand, that there is a good relationship between parents and their children, that is, a high level of parental involvement (48%). On the other hand, it'll do harm in formation of learners' autonomy in future and arise some big problems in studying.

According to the majority of respondents (61%), teachers care about student homework performance. Moreover, most of the students have good relations with the teacher, respectively; the teacher knows the capabilities of the student, such situation has a positive effect on the organization and implementation of homework. However, as most students note, the teacher, unfortunately, does not systematically comment on homework.

Thus, the problem of improving the effectiveness of teaching can be successfully solved only if the high quality of the classes provided is supported by well-organized homework of the students. But since most students in grades 5 and 7 find it difficult to get up in the morning, a third of students get tired in class, a quarter of students experience nervous tension during homework, it is necessary to create favorable conditions for students to effectively complete homework.

The findings of this survey may help in implementing better performance of homework which in its turn will lead to a better studying of middle school students in Kazakhstani secondary schools.

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